



Socio-political continuity as a struggle of clinical structures

A Lacanian approach to political narratives

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ABSTRACT

The article shows how the tools of Lacanian psychoanalysis can be used to study the socio-political field while analysing the phenomenon of socio-political continuity and Polish political identifications during the first months of the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The first part of the text discusses the basic categories of Lacanian theory to be used to study the subject's identity (fantasy, clinical structures). The author argues that these categories can be used to analyse political narratives in order to extract the underlying affective interests of the subjects constructing these narratives. The author also shows how these categories are used by other researchers for socio-political analysis: they successfully describe the revolutionary succession of socio-political orders constructed in accordance with one of the three clinical structures listed by Lacan. However, the author, in the second part of the text, uses the example of Polish political narratives about the war in Ukraine — to show that the socio-political field at any moment is full of many different, competing political narratives, each structured in a way characteristic of one of the clinical structures. This means that the socio-political field is a space where various affective interests of community members clash, and the stake in constructing various political narratives is the extension of their own interests to as large a part of society as possible. As a consequence, the socio-political plane of continuity turns out to be a dynamic and open space to a much greater extent than the very notion of continuity suggests.

KEYWORDS

Lacanian psychoanalysis; fantasy; political discourse; neuroses; perversion; psychoses

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of how and why people identify with particular political narratives is an inexhaustible source of analyses in philosophy and social sciences. Interestingly, in recent years, to conduct those analyses, more and more researchers have been turning to psychoanalysis, especially Lacanian psychoanalysis. And not only for this purpose. Lacanian psychoanalysis has recently attracted considerable attention as a method of studying almost all cultural phenomena, but it's mostly theoreticians applying Lacanian tools to the socio-political sphere who gain the status of intellectual celebrities and recognition that goes way beyond the academic community. The world-famous Slavoj Žižek in his books, articles and online videos not only explains the intricacies of Lacanian thought, but also uses Lacanian tools to analyse almost all contemporary socio-political phenomena. Yannis Stavrakakis, who uses Lacanian psychoanalysis to diagnose the state of western democracy and analyse the phenomenon of populism, also enjoys international recognition. In Poland, Andrzej Leder — whose most famous book *Prześniona rewolucja* [*Revolution of the sleepwalkers*] uses Lacanian apparatus to reveal the desires repressed by the Polish middle class — is an intellectual eagerly invited by the media to comment on phenomena of all kinds.

This popularity of contemporary Lacanians is perhaps no accident. Lacanian psychoanalysis, used, until recently, mostly in the offices of psychotherapists, is bursting not only onto the academic scene, but also into popular culture — offering comprehensive descriptions and, perhaps more importantly, diagnoses of political identifications in particular communities and whole societies. And apparently this publicity is being met with broad social and academic approval.

Not everyone, however, is enthusiastic about applying psychoanalysis to socio-political research. One of the doubts raised by the critics of this method is whether the diagnoses it proposes bring anything new or even interesting to the current state of research. Polish historical sociologist, Wiktor Marzec, formulates this objection as follows:

When [...] we leave the area of somewhat self-referential theoretical debates and wish to see how the theory works in practice, what type of analysis of political and social processes it is capable of and what its explanatory and heuristic potential for generating new knowledge is, we can get the unpleasant impression that a cannon is being used to fire volleys at sparrows (Marzec, 2013: 43–44).¹

An example of such a volley fired at sparrows is, according to Marzec, Stavrakakis' diagnosis of the western project of liberal democracy as emotionally

¹ All translations of Polish-language works are provided by the author of the paper.

barren and therefore incapable of arousing social mobilisation, which Marzec finds trite (Marzec, 2013: 44).

However, the triteness of diagnoses is not the most serious objection to socially and politically oriented psychoanalysis. A much more serious accusation, formulated even by some psychoanalysts, is the inability of psychoanalysis to study collective subjects — which includes, of course, political communities — due to the lack of tools available for this purpose or even the lack of such subjects to study. Psychoanalysis, after all, is a theory and practice relating to the individual subject; its tools were designed for that purpose and, perhaps more importantly, the existence of any kind of collective unconscious has not been proved in any way — and if there's no unconscious, there's no subject.²

This objection, if compelling, would undoubtedly defeat the great ambitions of the contemporary Lacanians. So it shouldn't come as a surprise that in one form or another it has been opposed by many researchers who apply Lacanian psychoanalysis to socio-political research.³

This article itself can certainly be considered another attempt at refuting this accusation. But perhaps it goes one step further. By examining the phenomenon of socio-political continuity and analysing political identifications in Polish society in one particular period of time, I will try to show that Lacanian psychoanalysis is more than suitable for social and political diagnosis. And I will do my best to prove that these diagnoses do not have to be trite.

FANTASY AS THE REALM OF THE POLITICAL

What makes Lacanian psychoanalysis fit for the study of the socio-political sphere is, first and foremost, its purpose: it is used to study the subject's identity. This includes the study of the process of (self-)identification and the phenomena with which the subject identifies. Political identification is no exception as it is one of the aspects of the subject's identity. And it can be studied using the same category that is used to study all the other aspects of subject's identity — the category of fantasy. What's interesting is that, on the grounds of Lacan's theory, fantasy always has a socio-political character. In fact, fantasy is nothing but a subject's identity, that is a vision of oneself and the world surrounding the subject, created in specific social and political circumstances. And

² This was clearly articulated by Lacan himself who in one of his interviews said: "Psychoanalysis is a serious matter that concerns [...] a strictly personal relationship between two people — the subject and the analyst. There is no collective psychoanalysis, just as there are no collective fears or neuroses" (Lacan, 2008: 198).

³ An overview of this kind of objection and the arguments refuting them can be found, for example, in the works of Stavrakakis (Stavrakakis, 1999: 1–12) and Leder (Leder, 2022: 164–166).

that is because it has a narrative form. Fantasy is, as Leder writes, “a scenario. Or a drama, a story unfolding in a certain sequence and in a certain topography” (Leder, 2014: 14). This sequence and topography include the subject’s socio-political circumstances that play a great role in constructing the fantasy and, therefore, the identity of the subject.

And both on a conscious and an unconscious level. Because just like the subject, fantasy has two sides. One is the conscious side, inhabited by imaginary figures — events and people from our lives, from the history of our country and the world. This side is the story that we tell ourselves, the narrative about what is, what was and what should be — the narrative that is articulated or at least ready to be articulated. The other side of fantasy is the unconscious side, containing the very structure of the story which positions the imaginary figures in a certain way. This side contains the subject’s unconscious desire that makes them who they are, meaning that, as Leder puts it, it “organises the structure of the subject” (Leder, 2014: 14).

This applies to both the individual and the collective subject. Despite general doubts concerning the existence of collective subjects, on the grounds of Lacan’s theory it would be very problematic to make a clear distinction between the individual and the collective. As Leder writes in *The concept of de-sublation and the regressive process in history: Prolegomena*, subjectivity itself is understood by Lacan as “a structured field of utterances”, and “the subject appears as an instance of speech” and is “always assumed in any set of sentences” (Leder, 2022: 165). For Lacan, the subject is the one who speaks. The one with specific desires that tells a certain story about the world and the subject’s place in society. And in any given society there could be many subjects with the same desire telling the same story. Those are the subjects that form one collective subject.

But what exactly is this desire that organises stories told by individual and collective subjects? As Leder writes in *Prześniona rewolucja*:

The phantasmatic construction [i.e. fantasy — B.B.] is the fundamental structure that organises the subject, both individual and social. This structure is the desire of the Other; what the social world in its linguistic form wants from a subject placed in a particular position (Leder, 2014: 13).

Desire is therefore always somebody else’s. It belongs to a social world that wants something from the subject - or at least that’s how the subject feels. However, what the social world wants from the subject is not obvious at all. Fantasy is produced as an answer to this question, one the subject asks themselves because they don’t know the answer.

This not knowing is closely related to what the subject is according to Lacan. The subject is a lack — in the sense that they don’t have a rigid identity.

The subject is constantly shaped by other people, law and language. This continual shaping means that the subject is not a being and also that the subject suffers because of it. And it is this lack of being and the suffering associated with it that makes the subject desire to become a being — makes the subject desire to give themselves an identity. And not only give it to themselves, but also to the social world — to what Lacan calls the Other.

What fills in the lack in the subject and in the Other is fantasy — an imaginary identity organised in a certain way. Fantasy is a subject's story about themselves and the world, created in response to the question: What does the Other want from me? This question is related to two other questions that the subject asks themselves: "Who am I?" and "Who is the Other?" The answers to these questions are always socio-political in nature, because the stories always concern the collective world — they are certain visions of what is, what was and what should be. Each of them, as Stavrakakis writes, "attempts to remedy the fundamental deficiency (impossibility) [lack — B.B.] of the big Other, to 'restore' the fullness of the Other" (Stavrakakis, 1999: 47), and thus to give the social world a specific identity. Strictly political narratives are no different in this respect because "every political promise is supported by a reference to a lost state of harmony, unity and fullness, a reference to a pre-symbolic real which most political projects aspire to bring back" (Stavrakakis, 1999: 52).

So, political narratives offer a certain vision of the social world, one with which subjects marked by lack can identify. These narratives fight over which one will better fill the fundamental lack, gaining the support of the largest possible section of society. The moment of the collapse of a leading narrative and the emergence of another in its place is a revolutionary moment that psychoanalytic theory describes very well. Leder in *Prześlona rewolucja* focuses on one such moment — the fundamental change of the Polish paradigm from pre-modern to modern, a change that led to the complete reconfiguration of the Polish symbolic field and the related imaginary plane. According to Stavrakakis, those moments of radical rupture establish the realm of the political as such. A change in the political paradigm takes place when the existing paradigm and the prevailing narrative based on a certain fantasy is exhausted and reveals its own lack. That is when the encounter with the traumatic real reveals the shortcomings of the current political status quo, leading to its implosion. It is then that new, alternative socio-political narratives based on new fantasies appear, narratives that break with the previous order and try to symbolise the trauma of the real, thus covering over the lack that was revealed in the previous story. At the end of this process, one story wins the hegemonic struggle and takes the place of the previous one, becoming the new dominant narrative on the basis of which the new symbolic order is created (Stavrakakis, 1999: 70–74).

But what happens next? After all, revolution doesn't happen every day. Leder, referring to Martin Malia, suggests that each country has only one such moment in its history (Leder, 2014: 27). Whether this number is accurate or not, there is no doubt that these moments are merely points occurring in a certain historical space-time which may be called "socio-political continuity". But what is this continuity? What is its structure? Is it really static and linear as the word suggests?

It seems obvious that even in times that are difficult to call politically groundbreaking, the social world abounds in various political and ideological groupings, each of which produces narratives based on various imageries of what is, what was and what should be. Furthermore, within those groupings and in response to various events, many smaller narratives are often created. These narratives are sometimes closer to the "wings" of political options than the most centrist narratives of a given grouping — making the concept of socio-political continuity somewhat complicated.

The most basic application of psychoanalytic tools suggests that: different political narratives told within one community, and even within one political grouping, are different answers to the question what the Other wants from the subject and who the Other and the subject are. They offer different imageries of the subject and the social order — its rules and law. These differences are related to the specific desire that lies behind each of these stories. And it is the desire, even more than the narrative content of the imageries, that seems to gain or lose political support.

But how is it possible that in one society there can be many different desires producing different fantasies about the subject and the Other? And what makes them gain or lose political support? These questions will be answered by delving into the Lacanian category of clinical structure.

CLINICAL STRUCTURES

According to Lacan's theory, every subject functioning in society experiences lack and tries to fill it, but different subjects do that in different ways. Political or any other fantasy with which the subject identifies, is determined by a specific desire or rather a specific structure of desire and something that can be called "affective interest" that organises and drives both the subject and the political narratives with which the subject identifies.

Lacan distinguishes three such structures: neurosis (hysterical and obsessive), perversion and psychosis. Each has its own affective interest. These categories, though called clinical structures, are not so much diagnostic as descriptive: they do not define disorders but the position the subject occupies within the symbolic order or in relation to it. This means that there are no subjects who are not neurotic, psychotic or perverse.

It seems that this applies not only to individual subjects. Researchers using psychoanalytical tools to analyse the socio-political field observe features of these structures even at the level of entire societies at specific historical moments.

NEUROSIS

“Psychoanalysts frequently said that the nineteenth century in the West was an epoch of hysterical and obsessional neurosis” writes Leder in *Questions of denial — Covid as a catastrophe* (Leder, 2023: 163), linking the collective neurosis of 19th-century western society with the then extremely oppressive moral law, social commands and prohibitions internalised by subjects and generating an extremely severe instance of “conscience”. This conscience (in psychoanalytic terms, “ego-ideal” or super-ego) in turn contributed to the emergence of very specific internal conflicts between the subject’s aspirations and desires and the law prohibiting their fulfilment.

This very brief history of neurosis has its general, structural counterpart in the theory of Lacan, on the basis of which a subject with a neurotic structure is a subject that enters the symbolic order most deeply, submitting to its norms. The neurotic is the one who immerses themselves in language, symbolises themselves, thus resigning from those aspects of who they are and those aspirations that are of an other-than-symbolic nature.

According to Lacan, upon entering the symbolic order, the subject first becomes an alienated subject — i.e. one divided into consciousness and the unconscious and disconnected from the world — then secondly a separated subject — one that has undergone the process of sublimation of drives in favour of the order of desire. For what is forbidden in the symbolic order is, first of all, the pursuit of drives. Consequently, in the case of the neurotic, as Bruce Fink notes, the body “is essentially dead. It is written with signifiers; in other words, it has been overwritten or codified by the symbolic” (Fink, 1999: 97). The symbolic thus displaces the instinctual, making the neurotic the master of their body, or giving them power over drives. This power means that the subject is able to suppress, ignore, or eliminate them. Drives are replaced by desire, and the subject becomes the subject of desire. And this desire is modelled on how the subject imagines what the Other desires and what the subject’s positions in relation to the Other’s desire is. This is how a neurotic fantasy is created. However, the structure of the fantasy of the hysteric is very different from the obsessive.

Fantasy is a fictionalised answer to three questions: Who am I? Who is the Other? and What does the Other want from me? The hysteric — at the most general, structural and therefore unconscious level — answers as follows: The

Other is divided, the Other is lacking, they've lost the object of their desire and want to get it back. I, on the other hand, am the lost object of the Other's desire, now found by the Other, thereby making the Other complete again.

The expression "object of desire" means a symbolic object. The hysteric tries to guess and realise the symbolic values they consider desired by the Other, offering themselves as a symbolic creation, and thus overcoming the original alienation that took place between them and the Other upon entering the symbolic order.

However, this overcoming is only of a phantasmatic character. The hysteric is a stable subject, which means that — thanks to language — they are permanently alienated both from themselves (their unconscious) and from the outside world. They are also permanently separated from their drives.

Contrary to appearances, the position of the object of desire, a position the hysteric adopts, is not a submissive one. The hysteric, as Fink notes, positions themselves "as the object that makes the Other desire" (Fink, 1999: 120). In this way, although they appear to assume a subservient role to the Other — the role of an object — the hysteric is in control of the Other's desire. The desire of the Other is generated and sustained by the hysteric — by the fact that that desire is never satisfied. For the hysteric is well aware that desire exists and works only insofar as it remains unsatisfied. Establishing themselves as the object of the Other's unfulfilled desire, the hysteric maintains it, gaining power over it. By feigning dependence on the Other's desire, the hysteric manages to both overcome alienation and become independent of the Other.

The obsessive achieves a similar result using different methods. To the questions, "Who am I?" "Who is the Other?" and "What does the Other want from me?", the obsessive responds: "It doesn't matter who the Other is or what they want. The only subject whose desire counts is me, and the object of my desire has no relation to the Other and their desire".

Thus, as Fink notes, "the obsessive's fantasy implies a relationship with an object, but the obsessive refuses to acknowledge that this object is related to the Other" (Fink, 1999: 118). This refusal to acknowledge the relationship with the Other is perhaps most evident in the symptoms of obsessive neurosis treated as a disorder. The compulsions in the form of obsessive thoughts that the subject cannot get rid of, the compulsion to perform and repeat certain actions against their will — all these symptoms indicate a break in the relationship with the Other, or a break in the cause-and-effect chain in the relationship with them. The obsessive subject is the one who tries not to fit into the expectations of the Other or not to meet those expectations, in this way overcoming alienation, becoming "whole" again. In a symbolic relationship, the obsessive may incorporate in part the ambitions and desires that society has for them, but

refuse to acknowledge that those desires have anything to do with the expectations of the Other. Or, on the contrary, they may guess what the social expectations towards them are but choose to behave in an opposite manner.

In this way, the Other is neutralised: the obsessive “refuses to recognise the Other’s existence, much less the Other’s desire” (Fink, 1999: 119), thanks to which they become, in their own eyes, a completely individualised and sovereign subject who “believes himself to be master of his fate” (Fink, 1999: 122). In this way, the obsessive strives for independence of the Other. But so does the hysteric. Whereas the hysteric gains sovereignty by making themselves the object of the desire of the Other who manages this desire, the obsessive becomes their own master by cutting the Other out of the world or denying any connection with them. These two different strategies towards the Other’s desire therefore have a similar effect: an individual subject, independent of the Other and permanently separated from them. Because for the neurotic, the Other is too powerful, the social rules and prohibitions imposed by the Other are too oppressive and they can only be neutralised by making oneself an individualised subject.

This individualisation is undoubtedly a characteristic feature of modern societies, those shaped on the foundations of the Enlightenment. The psychoanalysts’ diagnosis of 19th-century Western societies mentioned by Leder should come as no surprise. What may be surprising, however, is that the modern Western subject, choosing individualism, at the same time chose limitations for the fulfilment of their own drives, which seems to be a far-reaching limitation for individualistic egocentrism. However, this paradox is only apparent. Undoubtedly, neurotic individualisation is a strategy used both against the desire of the Other and against the drives — bodily enjoyment, *jouissance*. For as Fink notes, “both the hysteric and the obsessive refuse to be the cause of the Other’s *jouissance*” (Fink, 1999: 128). The neurotic chooses to distance themselves from drives — not only the drives of the Other but also their own. Nevertheless, the construction of neurotic fantasy in a way “recovers” some of the lost *jouissance*. Entering the symbolic order means replacing the order of drives with the order of desire by way of sublimation. Desire is a symbolic distortion of drives, but a distortion which nevertheless fulfils those drives — albeit in a changed form and only partially. So, the acquisition of symbolic values, including capital or social prestige, in a sense satisfies the bodily drives by way of sublimation. In addition, the order of desire, by pushing the drives into the unconscious, makes their fulfilment all the more desirable by the subject. If it is true that “prohibition is what eroticizes” (Fink, 1999: 129), breaking the prohibitions gives the subject pleasure. This pleasure can be found not only in the darkness of one’s bedroom, but also, for example, in the unconscious satisfaction with the fact that the acquisition of symbolic values by the subject may mean harm to someone else.

Neurosis is, then, quite a cunning structure, providing a strategy for the pursuit of the most basic affective interest of the neurotic. This is, on the one hand, renouncement of *jouissance*, sacrificing it for the sake of symbolisation and undergoing the process of individuation and, on the other hand — silent, incomplete, distorted and happening almost exclusively in the unconscious re-acquisition of what has been lost. The same goal is also present in the political narratives with which the neurotic identifies.

PSYCHOSIS

While neurosis is a structure that generates a social system, psychosis indicates the breakdown of the symbolic bond. It seems that on the basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the expression “collective psychosis” can only mean the moment of a complete break with the social — with law, norms, commands and prohibitions. This may translate into the event of war that breaks interpersonal ties, including those guaranteed by the international order. On the basis of Lacan’s psychoanalysis, the psychotic subject does not function in a symbolic order. They do not function in language or law. This means that they do not function in the system of desire either. This is so because, as Fink notes, “Where the structure of language is missing, desire too is missing” (Fink, 1999: 101). Desire appears when the subject — through the element of language — enters social relations and ask themselves the question: What does the Other want from me? The psychotic subject does not ask this. They don’t ask, because “There is no properly human desire at all in psychosis” (Fink, 1999: 101). The lack of symbolic structure, and hence the lack of desire, is related to the fact that in psychosis “the unconscious is present, but not functioning” (Lacan, 1997: 143).

The unconscious is constituted and operates as a result of the subject’s entry into the order of language. Language is what defines and “normativises”, making it possible to push everything indefinite and non-normative into the unconscious. As a consequence, the subject who functions in the symbolic order paradoxically lives in a state of constant uncertainty due to the incompatibility between their conscious thoughts, feelings and desires and the echoes of what has been pushed into the unconscious. The psychotic does not feel this uncertainty. And not only do they not want to feel it — they can’t feel it either. According to Fink:

Where transparency has not given way to the opacity regarding my own thoughts and feelings [...] there too questioning and wondering are missing: I cannot call into question my past, my motives, or even my thoughts and dreams. They simply are (Fink, 1999: 101).

They simply are because they are visible, even tangible. They are not hidden in any darkness. The unconscious in psychosis does not function because its content is transparent. This, in turn, is related to the specific position of the psychotic subject towards the Other. Or rather, the lack of such a position. Since, as Lacan says, “the unconscious is the Other’s discourse” (Lacan, 2006: 316), in psychosis where the unconscious does not function, “the Other does not exist” (Fink, 1999: 193). In other words, there is no difference between the psychotic subject and the Other, the Other is not something external to the psychotic, because the psychotic does not distinguish between inside and outside and thus they do not set boundaries for themselves — they refuse to accept and adopt an identity. In psychosis, the process of alienation constitutive for subjectivity, taking place upon the subject’s entry into the order of social relations, has not occurred. As a result, the subject does not experience lack — neither in themselves nor in the Other. This lack of lack makes the psychotic’s ego fragile and in danger of disintegrating. Since the Other does not exist, the psychotic subject has never been able to internalise its commands and prohibitions, so they have not created a super-ego or ego-ideal that tells them who they are and should be, which, as Fink notes, puts the subject in a very difficult position:

Insofar as the ego-ideal serves to anchor one’s self, to tie it to the approval or recognition of a paternal Other, its absence leaves one with a precarious sense of self, a self-image that is liable to deflate or evaporate at certain critical moments (Fink, 1999: 89).

The lack of stability of the self is directly related to the lack of desire. The non-existent Other cannot have any ambitions or desires which the subject could internalise and try to pursue to earn the love and respect of the Other. As a consequence, while the alienated subject, on entering the symbolic order, in a sense renounces their drives or sublimates them in favour of desire, the psychotic does not undergo this process, remaining in the order of drives — in the order of *jouissance*. And since “desire is a defense, a defense against going beyond a limit in *jouissance*” (Lacan, 2006: 691), the psychotic is defenceless against *jouissance* and “suffers due to an uncontrollable invasion of *jouissance* in his or her body” (Fink, 1999: 174). This is, however, the price the psychotic subject is willing to pay for the fulfilment of their most basic affective interest. For the absence of desire does not mean that psychosis is a purposeless structure. On the contrary, its goal is clearly defined and consistently pursued by the psychotic subject. And this goal is what Sigmund Freud called the “oceanic feeling” — a state of feeling connected to everything.

This state was noticed by Klaus Theweleit (a psychoanalyst from a non-Lacanian tradition) in the notes, short stories, letters and other texts written by Freikorps soldiers describing their feelings while fighting in battles. In *Male fantasies*,

Theweleit quotes the texts of various authors, many of whom directly express the experience of having no boundaries during fighting. And that is, according to Theweleit, the whole point — making sure that the subject “will no longer be a name, an isolated man, but a German, a soldier, ‘I’ absorbed into the cosmos. Such is the soldier male’s oceanic feeling” (Theweleit, 2003: 185). On the basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis, this state of fusing with the cosmos is possible only when the subject refuses to create a fantasy or constructs something that could be called a negative fantasy, i.e. when they refuse to accept an identity and, as a result, their ties with the social world break. In the political domain, this state can be called war. So, it shouldn’t be surprising that for the psychotic the most attractive political narratives are those that invoke the state of war.

PERVERSION

In the context of social research, perversion sometimes functions as a descriptive category of the societies of the 20th-century totalitarian states and/or the very political structures of those states (such a diagnosis is made, for example, by Žižek in *The most sublime hysteric: Hegel and Lacan* and *Did somebody say totalitarianism?*). But it seems that what can be called a social perversion did not disappear with the end of World War II or the collapse of the USSR. The category of perversion in social research returns even today. Leder, for example, notices its symptoms in the widespread phenomenon of denying the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic (Leder, 2023: 157). Jan Potkański, on the other hand, sees the signs of perversion in Russia’s military actions in Ukraine and in numerous phenomena occurring in Polish society, starting with government policy towards teachers, to “anti-facemask” movements, and way too loud motorcycle riders who do not care about how late at night it is (Potkański, 2022). It seems that both researchers agree that the category of perversion applies to many contemporary social phenomena. Potkański even states that “the main anthropological problem of modernity is perverts, although the theoretical awareness of this fact has yet to be established” (Potkański, 2022: 134).

On the basis of Lacan’s theory, the perverse structure is more or less half-way between the psychotic and the neurotic structure, at least in the context of the process of symbolisation. The perverse subject undergoes one of its stages, the stage of alienation, becoming a subject divided into the conscious and the unconscious, and a subject alienated from the outside world. However, the perverse subject does not go through the second stage of the process of symbolisation, the stage of separation or castration — “the process of relinquishing *jouissance* in exchange for pursuing the symbolic achievements one desires” (Swales, 2012: 28–29). Thus, in the case of the perverse subject, the sublimation of drives in favor of the order of desire is not as complete as for

the neurotic subject. Unlike the neurotic who, in relation with the Other, renounces a large part of bodily *jouissance* which is replaced by desire of symbolic nature, the pervert does not make this renunciation and this translates into a specific structure of their fantasy. In response to the questions, "Who am I? Who is the Other and what do they want from me?" the pervert replies, "The Other is lacking, and what the Other lacks, what they want to get back, is *jouissance* of which I am the object and provider, thereby making the Other whole again".

The perverse subject is constituted as "the instrument of the Other's *jouissance*" (Lacan, 2006: 697). At first glance, this seems similar to the hysteric. In both cases, the subject assumes the position of an object in relation to the Other. However, while the hysteric makes themselves the object of the Other's desire, the pervert assumes the role of the object of the Other's enjoyment, an object which, as Stephanie Swales notes, "plugs the lack in the Other by giving the Other *jouissance*" (Swales, 2012: 75). The object of *jouissance*, unlike the object of desire, is an object experienced as material, even in a bodily way. This means that the pervert is convinced that both they and the symbolic goals and values desired by the Other are "desired" by the Other in an instinctual way — in a way that gives the Other pleasure. The pervert, putting themselves in the position of an object associated with the drives, places themselves as part of a fetish. This position is not a subject position in the strict sense, because, as Fink notes, it "does not entail something outside or beyond the Other" (Fink, 1999: 175). The perverse fantasy is an attempt at a material connection with the Other, and the pervert plays the role of the missing and recovered part of the Other. Unlike the neurotic who always slips through the net of the Other, the pervert wants to unite with the Other in an almost erotic act. And undoubtedly for the pervert it has its advantages. Unlike the neurotic subject, who is constantly trying to guess what symbolic values the Other might want from them, thus remaining in a state of constant uncertainty, the pervert has no doubt as to who, or rather what, they are. Their status as the object of the Other's *jouissance* is almost as certain to them as hallucinations are to the psychotic, for the "self" experienced as a physical object is not something to be doubted. This "self" is felt, and it is felt in a specific, exciting way, because the "self" as the object of pleasure also feels pleasure. The perverse subject therefore experiences *jouissance* to a much greater extent than the neurotic. And that is both a blessing and a curse for them.

Like neurosis, perversion can be understood as a strategy regarding *jouissance*. However, the purpose of this strategy is different. On the one hand, unlike the neurotic, the pervert does not agree to renounce the pleasure of drives for the sake of the Other. Furthermore, as Lacan notes, the pervert is the one "who pursues *jouissance* as far as possible" (Swales, 2012: 109). On the other hand, this structure is intended to "prop up the law so the limits can be

set to *jouissance*" (Fink, 1999: 165). This procedure, at least in principle, is to lead to the full symbolisation of the pervert, i.e. to make them undergo and complete the process of castration (which has not taken place).

This might suggest that the perverse subject does what they can to put themselves into the hands of the Other, to give the Other as much power as possible, while depriving themselves of power. But this is not exactly so what happens. For the perverse subject does not so much strengthen the Other as try to replace them, projecting their own law and imposing it on the Other. The pervert is characterised by "a core belief that the law and social norms are fraudulent at worst and weak at best" (Swales, 2012: xii). The law of the Other must therefore be replaced by the "better" law of the pervert.

But is their law any better? It seems that the two functions of the perverse structure — defence against the loss of *jouissance* and trying to put limits on it — serve the same purpose. The attempts to force castration (sacrifice *jouissance*) are, as a rule, unsuccessful or insufficient — or rather they seem designed in such a way as to increase *jouissance* by projecting a "law", which imposes only apparent limits on *jouissance*, limits that depend only on the pervert's will. These limits are just an outer shell of law — they are a defence against limits imposed on the pervert's *jouissance* from the outside, just as the law in the Third Reich or the USSR was designed to punish and prosecute internal and external enemies of "the Cause" in order to remove all restrictions on its implementation. A similar goal was apparently pursued by anti-facemask movements during the COVID pandemic, invoking "scientific research" exposing the dangers of wearing masks and articulating their own "epidemic safety rules" to legitimise non-compliance with the prevailing recommendations — in order to be able to breathe freely (Leder, 2023: 162).

This kind of defence against the loss of *jouissance* or an active attempt to increase it, e.g. by pretending to put limits on it, is precisely what constitutes, at the most basic level, the pervert's affective interest. Therefore, regarding *jouissance*, the pervert is, as Fink writes, "the only one who refuses to give it up and who is able to go out and get it" (Fink, 1999: 174). That is why the pervert chooses political narratives that guarantee pleasure. These are most often narratives promising power.

CO-OCCURRENCE OF CLINICAL STRUCTURES

Are neurotics, perverts and psychotics necessarily subjects living in different times? And can the political narratives with which these subjects identify exist in one society only as prevailing fantasies in specific historical periods? In other words, is the political history of the world, or even a country, a history of the revolutionary succession of socio-political orders with different structures

of prevailing fantasy, interspersed with moments of radical, psychotic break with the symbolic order? This suggestion undoubtedly makes sense. Indeed, it seems that at different historical moments in every society the characteristics of one clinical structure prevail. This doesn't mean, however, that fantasies with other structures disappear with the establishment of a new order consistent with the structure of the prevailing fantasy.

In non-revolutionary times, in more stable times of socio-political continuity one can also see the presence of political fantasies specific to various clinical structures. This is because the prevailing fantasy is always exclusive — in the sense that it pursues a specific affective interest, with which only some members of the political community can identify. Meanwhile, the interests of other members of the community also require fulfilment. And they are being fulfilled — through the construction of fantasies with a different structure than the prevailing one. In other words, at each historical moment, also in the times of political continuity, a society produces many different political narratives that pursue different affective interests characteristic of different clinical structures. Each is manifested in language by a specific defence mechanism. Those different defence mechanisms are present in political narratives at any time, also in times of socio-political continuity. And they can certainly be observed in Polish narratives regarding Russian aggression in Ukraine in the first months of the war.

DEFENCE MECHANISMS IN POLITICAL NARRATIVES

Each of the clinical structures (and, consequently, the political fantasy structured by it) is, as Swales notes, “constituted by a defining and causative ‘mechanism’, or form of negation” (Swales, 2012: xiii). This mechanism or form of negation is a defence mechanism characteristic of a given structure which in the first place constitutes and then maintains the already constituted structure of the subject, and in the second place allows one to cope with events/thoughts/feelings that are not accepted by the subject, and in the third place — it permits the pursuit of the most basic affective interest of the subject constituted by it.

REPRESSION

The basic form of negation in neurosis is repression. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis in *The language of psychoanalysis* define repression as

an operation whereby the subject attempts to repel, or to confine to the unconscious, representations (thoughts, images, memories) which are bound to an instinct.

Repression occurs when to satisfy an instinct — though likely to be pleasurable in itself — would incur the risk of provoking unpleasure because of other requirements (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988: 390).

On the most general level, the neurotic represses what is related to their drives and is forbidden by the Other. But this mechanism works similarly in the case of events taking place in external reality. In neuroses, as Fink notes, “reality is affirmed in some very basic sense, but pushed out of consciousness” (Fink, 1999: 113). This push-out establishes the fundamental topography of the neurotic subject. What is unacceptable gets pushed “inwards”. Repression is a mechanism which, in the first instance, establishes the unconscious as a separate area from the rest of the psychic apparatus, and in the second instance — pushes the unacceptable content in it.

This content, as Fink argues, is “neither perception nor affect, but the thoughts pertaining to perceptions, the thoughts to which affect is attached” (Fink, 1999: 113). This means that

[a]ffect and thought are generally connected or linked at the outset; but when repression occurs, affect and thought are generally detached from each other, and the thought may be put out of consciousness (Fink, 1999: 113).

This is usually the case with the hysterics. In the case of obsessives, the opposite situation often occurs — the thought remains, but the affect gets repressed (Fink, 1999: 113–114).

Whether a thought or an affect is removed from consciousness has large implications for how the hysteric and the obsessive communicate. Anna Freud noticed that in therapeutic practice hysterical patients

exclude from consciousness the ideational representatives of their sexual impulses. The form of their resistance to free association is analogous. Associations which put the ego on its defense are simply dismissed. All that the patient feels is a blank in consciousness. He becomes silent (Freud, 1993: 35).

The obsessional patient, on the other hand

does not fall silent; he speaks, even when in a state of resistance. But he severs the links between his associations and isolates ideas from affects when he is speaking, so that his associations seem as meaningless on a small scale as his obsessional symptoms on a large scale (Freud, 1993: 35).

Both ways of communication could be observed in the Polish public debate related to the war in Ukraine in the first months of the war. The media appeals to Poles to help refugees from Ukraine and reporting on a massive social

mobilisation in this matter issued by both the pro-government public media and private media supporting the opposition seemed to have clear features of the hysteric strategy. Leder, in an interview given to Jakub Majmurek for *Krytyka Polityczna*, puts forward the thesis that the mass help given to Ukrainians by Poles was an attempt to save — in their own eyes — the Polish image tarnished by the internal and external political conflicts generated in recent years (Majmurek, 2022) which suggests that it was a result, to a large extent, of a guilty conscience. Perhaps this thesis is not exaggerated.

Undoubtedly, one can get the impression that with the outbreak of war and the refugee crisis, Polish internal and external conflicts lost importance. Liberal, right-wing and left-wing groups took part in the social mobilisation, and attacks by the public media on the opposition and by opposition media against the government lost momentum. This loss of momentum seems symptomatic. The internal political conflict in Poland has certainly not disappeared. The conflict between Poland and the European Union has not disappeared either. And yet, both conflicts have largely disappeared from the public discourse and thus also, it can be assumed, from the consciousness of Polish society. Ukraine has become a figure of the Other — suffering and traumatised by a common, politically and spiritually alien enemy, but also of the Other — making ethical demands and possessing European aspirations and political desires. Poland, on the other hand, has been cast as the object of the Other's desire — the one who can help Ukraine, but only on the condition that it is ethically clean and functions within the framework of the European symbolic space. Only then can Poland offer Ukraine the symbolic values it desires. Poland can offer them symbolic values only when everything that is shameful, ethically questionable, marked by an aggressive drive and evoking guilt is repressed into the social unconscious.

A different structure can be observed in narratives in which the war in Ukraine is blamed on global capitalism and the political and military structures supporting it. In the narrative of the left-wing Pracownicza Demokracja [Worker's Democracy] movement, the guilty party is the capitalist imperialism embodied by both Russia and NATO — which seem to be the two faces of one evil.⁴ The postulate of the movement is the overthrow of capitalism and global disarmament which, it can be assumed, go hand in hand. Interestingly, in this narrative, Russian crimes committed against Ukrainians are not repressed. They do not disappear from consciousness. Instead, what seems to disappear is the affect that accompanies awareness of them. In this narrative, Russian war crimes seem to be treated similarly to capitalist symbolic violence, yet the affect

⁴ The following passage regarding Pracownicza Demokracja is based on the author's analysis of the selected publication retrieved from Pracownicza Demokracja's official website (e.g. *Oświadczenie*, 2022; *Rosyjscy socjaliści*, 2022; Żebrowski, 2022).

rather accompanies the latter and is related to the operation of international institutions of the liberal order. This happens because the cause-and-effect relationship with the symbolic order is broken. The figure of the Other here is undoubtedly the capitalist system and the liberal institutions supporting it, generating generally accepted economic and ethical norms, from whose power one must break free. This narrative is therefore accompanied by the agenda of independence from the prevailing symbolic order, and this agenda has nothing to do with the war in Ukraine. But still, like the symptoms of the obsessive neuroses treated as a disorder, this agenda is being brought up over and over again, regardless of the circumstances, and regardless of whether the category of class struggle applies to the issue of war or not, making the narrative about the war seem void of meaning.

Both narratives, although structurally different, have one thing in common. In each of them something is hidden, repressed. This ability to hide facts or affects from oneself is characteristic of neurotic fantasy. As Fink notes,

whereas the psychotic may reveal all of his or her “dirty laundry” with no apparent difficulty, airing all of the scabrous feelings and deeds anyone else would be ashamed to divulge, the neurotic keeps such things hidden from view, from others and from him- or herself (Fink, 1999: 113).

This is possible thanks to the relationship with language which the neurotic has. As the neurotic subject has undergone the full process of symbolisation, i.e. both alienation and separation (castration), they have managed to tame language and therefore control, to a large extent, what is said and what is hidden, even if they themselves don't fully realise it.

Yet this control is not total. What is repressed persistently returns — in dreams, physical symptoms, or finally in a consciously conducted narrative, articulated by a neurotic, in which the “return of the repressed” manifests itself in slips of the tongue, the emphasising of certain words, expressions or topics, in understatements, omissions, ambiguities, contradictions, logical or imaginary condensations or semantic shifts. In the case of the neurotic, the one who talks is first and foremost the unconscious. And what identifies the neurotic structure are the linguistic manifestations of the mechanism of repression.

FORECLOSURE

The form of negation proper to psychosis is foreclosure, which is, as Fink writes,

the radical rejection of a particular element from the symbolic order (that is, from language), and not just any element: it involves the element that in some sense grounds or anchors the symbolic order as a whole (Fink, 1999: 79).

The psychotic rejects the very structure of language (i.e. symbolisation as such), thus rejecting the symbolic Other. This rejection has an impact on their narrative about themselves, the world and the events that take place in it. Foreclosure is used to deal with reality that is not accepted by the psychotic subject. On the structural level, the psychotic refuses to accept and go through the process of alienation. At the level of functioning in the world, the psychotic copes with facts and events they do not accept, not so much by erasing them from consciousness and memory after noticing them, but by refusing to recognise them at all — rejecting them, excluding them. Psychosis indicates, as Laplanche and Pontalis write, “the outright ‘rejection’ (*verwefen*) of an idea from consciousness in the case of hallucinatory confusion” or “a kind of primal projection of a ‘self-reproach’ on to the outside world” (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988: 371).

The term “outside” is as crucial as it can be confusing. Psychotic hallucinations are, in a sense, a complete negation of the symbolic order and the division between consciousness and the unconscious, inside and outside. What is not accepted by the psychotic is not hidden in the unconscious, but released “outside”, projected onto the world as something separate from the subject. Accordingly, hallucinations, although they are produced by the subject, are not considered interpretations of reality, but reality itself. This is due to the lack of alienation from the world, and thus the lack of creating a “self” separate from the external world. It sounds paradoxical that projecting “self-reproach” outward indicates that there is no structural division between inside and outside, but this is precisely the case.

This lack of division between inside and outside in the domain of Polish politics can be observed, for example, in anti-Ukrainian narratives constructed by pro-Russian “nationalist” groups. In Piotr Głuchowski’s reportage on one such group, Kamracto Rodaków, the association is described as “pan-Slavic” (its members call Poles “Slavs” and Poland — the “Slavic land”), as is its leader — a person who publicly praises Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin (Głuchowski, 2022). In their narrative, Ukraine is portrayed as a criminal neo-Banderist regime, and political cooperation between Poland and Ukraine is called “a crime against the Polish nation” and “betrayal of the Polish National Interest” (*Oświadczenie NR 90/2022*, 2022). The lack of division between inside and outside, characteristic of the psychotic structure, manifests itself here in the choice of the figure of the Other. Unlike in the hysteric construction, the figure of the Other is not Ukraine but its aggressor, Russia, which as a Slavic country is not an entity separate from Poland, but an entity which, going to war with Ukraine, pursues Polish interests. Ukraine is what is pushed outside, not considered Slavic. Ukraine is the “self-reproach” projected outward, embodying what is hostile and threatening to Poland, i.e. the international symbolic order constructed around the idea of liberal state.

In the theory of Lacan, the consequence of the psychotic state of unity with the Other is the unwavering certainty of the experience, because “doubt, doubting we know who we are and know who the Other is, is born and enabled by alienation” (Swales, 2012: 41). There is no such doubt in the narrative of *Kamracto Rodaków*. The members of the group know that 1) Russia is not only an ally of Poland, but is also an entity connected with it, 2) Ukraine and Western countries are enemies, 3) they themselves are the real Poles, and 4) other Polish political agents who do not share their beliefs are traitors (the certainty of the latter issue is so high that *Kamracto* is already preparing “death lists” with the names of traitors (Głuchowski, 2022).

However, the experience of unity with the world and the unwavering certainty of experience are not the only determinants of psychotic discourse. The mechanism of foreclosure is also manifested in the very way the narrative is communicated. Since foreclosure concerns the rejection of the structure of language, language as such appears to the psychotic as something alien, as an element detached from the subject, an element they do not control. The result of this state of affairs are disruptions in communication (Fink, 1999: 94–95). In the case of *Kamracto*, this disruption is manifested in the videos broadcast as part of their NPTV (Independent Polish TV) initiative, in which the presenters, among others, take calls from viewers and if they don't like what they hear they throw insults at the callers, simulate shooting them with a gun and/or hang up on them (Głuchowski, 2022). All these actions testify to a fundamental refusal to communicate, and thus the refusal to accept the symbolic nature of the Other. This refusal is necessary for the psychotic structure. Communicating with someone who thinks differently would open up space for uncertainty which a subject with a psychotic structure cannot agree to. Therefore, in their discourse one can find many phrases that testify to certainty, and close to zero words and expressions that suggest ambiguity, uncertainty or ambivalence. This also means that there are no hidden meanings one can look for. In psychosis, “nothing is repressed and thus there are no secrets one keeps from oneself” (Fink, 1999: 98). And since there are no secrets to keep from oneself, there are also no secrets to keep from others.

DENIAL

The form of negation constitutive for the perverse subject is denial. According to Phebe Cramer, a researcher of defence mechanisms in psychoanalytic theory, denial refers to “a mental operation in which attention is withdrawn from external stimuli that, if recognised, would cause psychological pain or upset” (Cramer, 1990: 37). However, this mechanism also works against unacceptable

feelings or thoughts of the subject. In this case, denial includes “a warding off of certain internal stimuli, accompanied by a covering over, or a ‘screen’, which substituted for the painful thought” (Cramer, 1990: 37).

As the pervert has undergone the process of alienation but not castration, they therefore experience an excess of *jouissance* (Swales, 2012: xii). What is negated thanks to the mechanism of denial are thoughts related to the perception of loss of pleasure, i.e. the perception of castration (separation). This negation, however, works differently than in the case of repression and foreclosure. In the case of denial “An event may be perceived but only accepted in a negated form, as in ‘It didn’t happen that way’” (Cramer, 1990: 37). This means that the subject does not question the fact that some event took place; the subject questions the interpretation of this event and changes it. Along with the change in the understanding of the situation, the accompanying affects also change. While repression, as Leder writes, “is accompanied by the appearance of a repressive law which prevents access both to the traumatic event and to *jouissance*” (Leder, 2023: 160), the pervert does not lose access to the unacceptable reality but negates the way of understanding it that causes unpleasant feelings. The unpleasant understanding of the situation is replaced by another, parallel one which is, as Leder writes, “distant from the reality principle” (Leder, 2023: 161). This does not mean, however, that the pervert completely loses access to the kind of understanding of the event that evokes unpleasant feelings. For denial, as Swales observes, “involves the maintenance of two contradictory pieces of knowledge together with a strongly held belief that one of the two pieces of knowledge is true” (Swales, 2012: 78). So, the pervert realises that an event can be understood differently from how they understand it, but they choose to construct their own, alternative understanding. Given the choice between painful truth and a fantasy that is far removed from the reality principle, the pervert chooses fantasy. This choice is dictated by a very specific interest. The alternative reality of fantasy is, like Freud’s dreams, a “reality” that fulfils wishes. But only while awake. These fantasies are, as Leder writes, “fitting the subjects’ desires and cathexes” (Leder, 2023: 161). This means that denial is a tool used by the pervert to regain *jouissance*.

This regaining of *jouissance* is related to maintaining a specific subject position — the position of the object of the Other’s *jouissance*. This position is associated with certainty, which translates into the way the pervert communicates. Unlike in the discourse of the psychotic, whose statements do not admit of any suggestion that any other understanding of a given situation is possible, the pervert creates complex constructions in which the second part is the negation of the first. As Swales notes,

Perverse certainty is evident in the second phrase in each disavowal; the claim attached to “but all the same” is the one that the pervert believes to be true despite evidence to

the contrary. The pervert's certainty bears resemblance to what has often been called "magical thinking" with regard to children (Swales, 2012: 107).

This magical thinking often takes the form of what Eric Santner, in *History beyond the pleasure principle: Some Thoughts on the representation of trauma*, calls "narrative fetishism", which he defines as "a strategy of undoing, in fantasy, the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere" (Santner, 1992: 144). Thanks to this construction, the subject "seeks voluntaristically to reinstate the pleasure principle" (Santner, 1992: 147) without doing the work of mourning necessary for this purpose.

The features of such a construction are visible in the narrative of some Polish right-wing circles about a possible Polish-Ukrainian political union or even the unification of both countries under the leadership of Poland — an narrative about the creation or restoration of a great Polish empire, Poland with Easter Borderlands. A vision of this kind was expressed by Andrzej Zybertowicz, the adviser of the President of Poland in an interview for *Gazeta Pomorska*. Zybertowicz describes the concept of a Polish-Ukrainian union or the "Commonwealth of many nations" as a possible "great adventure" (Willma, 2022). The war taking place in Ukraine undoubtedly exists in this narrative, it is not repressed, but it is understood not as a traumatic event, but as a contribution to an exciting event — the recovery or re-creation of a Polish political empire. The trauma of war is denied here by creating a complex narrative structure in which horrors only take place in the background and are obscured by the imagery of a Polish empire which functions as the second part of the contradiction — the "but all the same" part. The relationship between Poland and Ukraine is undoubtedly significant in this narrative. Ukraine is featured as the Other experienced by lack, the traumatised Other who is to become whole again thanks to material union with Poland. Thus, in this narrative, Poland takes the position of a fetish, but — as is usually the case in narratives based on the structure of perverse fantasy — this position is ambiguous. Poland is supposed to be the object thanks to which Ukraine regains its lost fullness, and yet *jouissance* seems to be on the side of Poland: it is Poland that leads the united entity, that extends its influence, that imposes its law on Ukraine — replacing Ukraine in a sense, or even negating it as a separate, sovereign entity.

Undoubtedly, there are more narratives bearing the characteristics of a perverse structure in the Polish political discourse. However, regardless of the form they take and the specific imageries they use, their goal is always the same — to provide the subject with pleasure and thus fill the lack in the subject in the same way the subject tries to fill the lack in the Other.

CONCLUSIONS

The presence of various defence mechanisms in different political narratives seems to prove that at every historical moment, including times of political continuity, the socio-political sphere of each community is always full of competing political narratives based on different imageries of what the symbolic order should be, i.e. who determines the rules of life in the community and what those rules are. The differences between the imageries revealed in political narratives not only represent divisions into political groupings, but also internal divisions that arise within each of these groupings due to the affective interest of the subjects constructing these narratives. However, these divisions are not static. The purpose of political narratives is not only to speak on behalf of subjects of the same fantasy structure, or to represent subjects with an affective interest consistent with the structure of a given narrative. The goal, it seems, is to reach the largest section of society with a political message, to make society their own and thus to graft a specific affective interest onto society's members, giving the whole community a specific identity, one structured in a certain way.

Undoubtedly, at every moment in history, certain political narratives prevail over others, gaining the support of a larger portion of society. However, this victory is never absolute, much less permanent. The socio-political field is a space where various affective interests of community members clash, and the stakes in constructing various political narratives is the extension of their own interests to as large a part of society as possible. This seems to be the political stakes of Lacan's theory of the subject. After all, the Lacanian subject, including the collective subject, is lacking. This means that it is constantly filled with something that it is not — an identity that is a product of a world of social relations, language and law. However, this identity is not established once and for all. It is not a structure with rigid identification. It is not what is socially and politically determined forever. It is an imaginary, a non-substantial creation, which may change due to the activity of the Other.

Moreover, it seems that the structure of the Other can also change. The space of activity of the Other, and therefore the space of social relations, is not substantial and fixed once and for all. The fundamental lack that the subject discovers in themselves is also present in social relations. If several different imageries of the symbolic order can function within one community, we may assume that they are constituted and changed through mutual contact. In this way, the unconscious structures of desire that constitute specific imageries of the symbolic order may undergo evolution — and not necessarily revolution — which will be manifested on the articulated level in the statements of politicians or in media coverage.

So, the socio-political plane of continuity is a much more dynamic and open space than the notion of continuity suggests. The struggle of affective interests

continues at all times, creating complex affective dynamics, where one narrative is always dominant, but others are always near behind, breathing down its neck and tempting society with the fulfilment of various affective interests — interests that can be acquired and transferred.

What allows us to follow this struggle, what makes it possible to understand what's at stake and what enables us to predict what the victory of each of the narratives functioning in a given community may lead to, are the tools of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Perhaps it's time to start using them on a larger scale.

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